Nixon Staff Cut Rejected

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The House, apparently wary of a charge of playing impeachment politics, has balked at demands for a cutback in President Nixon's White House and budget office staffs.

"You can quarrel with the President all you want," Rep. Edward J derwinsky, R-Ill., lectured his colleagues. "But at least he's entitled to his staff."

On a series of votes in a long day's consideration of two bills yesterday, the House:

● Watered down a Civil Service Committee recommendation to limit the number of highest salaried White House aides by protecting, on a vote of 53 to 5, those who now serve.

The bill would not change the total number of White House super-grades but would take away the President's flexibility in setting salaries. It will allow, for instance, only five instead of 14 jobs at $42,500 a year and would set limits for all the rest.

● Rejected, 336 to 77, an amendment by Rep. J.J. Pickle, D-Tex., to reduce the total number of White House super-grades from 65 to 40.

● Rejected, 252 to 152, an amendment from Rep. Joseph P. Addabbo, D-N.Y., to cut $6 million from the $22 million budget for the Office of Management and Budget, which he described as a "growing octopus with nine lives": But approved, 287 to 104, a milder cut of $2.9 million, offered by Rep. H.R. Gross, R-Iowa.

Despite these votes, the congressmen have complained repeatedly about the growing power of OMB and the arrogance of the White House inner-circle of top presidential aides. Privately, however, they talked yesterday of a fear that an anti-President vote would be seen as an unfair slap at Nixon on the eve of impeachment.

Pickle argued unsuccessfully that by trimming the power of White House aides, Congress would strengthen both the President and the Cabinet. Rep. Morris Udall, D-Ariz., backing the committee bill, said it is time to do away with the "blank check" system of ungraded positions at the White Houee.

But Rep. Charles Whalen, R-Ohio, said that it would be unfair to "change the rules in the middle of the game." He offered the amendment to protect the present White House staff. Otherwise, some might have had to accept salary cuts.

Two separate bills were before the House. One, the White House staffing measure, is needed as legal authority for part of the other, a $5.5 billion appropriations bill covering the Post Office, Treasury Department and the White House. The staff bill passed on a voice vote. The appropriations measure cleared, 367 to 13. Both now must go to the Senate, which has been considering similar measures.